

April 6, 1940

Nelle Y. McLaughlin  
Marlinton, W. Va.

POCAHONTAS COUNTY

-1-

Chapter 4- Section 2

My friend, Moody Moore, close observer of things in general and out of door things in particular, has been telling me for years of an Indian grave on the old road between the Jake place and Huntersville, about opposite the mouth of Browns Creek. In the days of his youth, he had hunted for the traditional jar of silver buried on the rising ground near the mouth of a stream, away back in the 1750's or 1760's.

His uncle the late William Moore of Browns Creek, had found a large heap of piled stones when he worked on the new road around the Jake Hill in 1890. He told the young nephew about it and Moody proceeded to investigate to see if by any chance this might be the place the treasure was buried.

Moving tons of stones, Mr. Moore found no silver, but he did uncover the bones of not less than a half dozen men. The bodies had been laid in a circle, feet to the center. One at least had been a man of gigantic stature, with a skull of unusual thickness. From the way his teeth were worn down, it was presumed he had been up in years when he met death. No silver was found, nor anything else to show whether Indians or whites had been buried there. The bodies had been placed upon the carpet of forest leaves and moulded, with no excavation, and tons of stones piled upon them. The heap was circular and per-

POCATELLO COUNTY

-2-

haps a rod in diameter.

The tragedy which overtook this party will remain one of the mysteries of these mountains. If they were Indians and the victims of a battle between tribes, I read the sign that they belonged to the victorious side. They were laid to rest with care on a pleasant bench in the full light of the rising sun. But if Indians, surely some stone weapons, implements and ornaments would have been found.

As for the whites, it is not unlikely that parties of hunters and trappers met death in the forest vastness of these mountains prior to the general settlements which began in the late 1760's and early 70's. Cold might wipe them out in the winter; the regulars of the standing armies of the Six Nations, in accord with provisions of the Treaty of Albany, 1722, would kill any whites trespassing upon Indian ground; a party of mercenary scalp hunters looking for scalps to claim bounty at Detroit in French and Indian war times, would murder whomever they found; or it may have been the work of a bloody band of outlaws raiding a camp for the winter fur catch. Indian regulars, mercenaries or white outlaws would leave the bones of their victims to bleach where they fell, to be gathered together for decent and perhaps Christian burial by the first party of white hunters.

Little or no record need ever be expected now to be found of such disappearances. There was a strong order by the King of Great Britain to keep out of the Indian Country

POCAHONTAS COUNTY

-3-

on the western waters. By solemn treaty he said that the Indian could kill with impunity any of his subjects so trespassing. No record of such loss, if known, would be upon the court books at Staunton. In the Augusta County records there now and then appears the notation of a man on the delinquent tax list or one wanted for debt or for trial or witness "Disappeared in the Greenbrier Country."

Along in the 1750's in the Greenbrier Country, "a days journey from Ft. Dinwiddie" on Jacksons River, a party of Indians, some say as many as fifteen, were killed by whites. This brought reverberations even to the King's court at London, and that mighty monarch made due apology to the Indian nation for the breach upon their people. The man responsible got out of it by saying he could not tell what kind of Indians they were; they looked like a war party of Shawnees to him, and he was taking no chances.

That sounded so like a Marlinton trick to me that I have always put Marlins Bottom as the place where it was pulled. However, the mound at Huntersville is twenty miles from Fort Dinwiddie---a fair days walk on mountain trails---and it may be this cairn marks the resting place of these friendly Indians done to death through excess of caution, to put the best face possible on the matter.

The absence of any personal belongings of stone would indicate burial after robbery. The care with which the bodies were laid away indicates to me burial by friends. The placing of the bodies on top of the ground may mean burial in the

POCAHONTAS COUNTY

-4-

winter time on frozen ground, or merely lack of good digging implements and hurry to get away by the survivors. However, they did a good job of rock piling.

The good state of preservation of the bones is sign to me that burial could not have been long before the arrival of settlers in the Knapps Creek valley, about one hundred sixty-five years ago.

There are Indian mounds scattered all over this region; most of dirt but occasionally a stone pile. In some of them remains of men are found, with personal stone belongings. In others only the sign of fire is seen.

Talking about lost men in these mountains, I would say that for wholesale disappearance the "Sandy Creek Voyage" holds the record. This was a demonstration in force against the Indian towns on the Ohio River. It was staged in cold weather to catch the Indians in winter quarters, before they were ready for their spring time raids. The army traveled by way of the Big Sandy route. On the Tug Fork or Sandy on the way out a young buffalo was killed. The hide was hung in a tree to be taken on the return trip. The ones who did return that way were so hungry they cut the hide up in thongs - tugs-and ate it. Hence the name Tug River.

The winter had been mild east of the mountains, but when the army got well into the mountains there was one or those late snow storms with great cold which so often end up a mild winter. They talk about two feet of snow and twenty degrees below zero

POCAHONTAS COUNTY

-5-

and no doubt the Sandy Creek voyagers experienced that much and more. The army broke up into small parties to work their way back to the settlements east of the mountains. How many perished from cold exposure and starvation is not known. I have no doubt that some of the parties attempted to return by way of the Greenbrier valley- the most direct route home for those who were from the Jackson River, Cow Pasture and Shenandoah settlements. There were two causes for the army breaking up. One was that each rugged individual composing the army had a better way home than the one proposed by the leaders. We have people in the mountains to this day who demonstrate such character. The other reason was that by breaking up in smaller parties, and spreading out over different routes, some would find game and get through, while if they stuck together all might perish. It is not an unreasonable guess that the bones under the rock pile near Huntersville might possibly be the remains of a party returning from the ill fated Sandy Creek Voyage. anyway, these mountains were full of freezing, starving men, trekking back home in the deep snow and fearful cold of a late winter storm.

Some years ago a number of well preserved skeletons were found behind a wall under a rock cliff on the Greenbrier below the Buckley place at the mouth of Swago. My guess was that these were Sandy Creek voyagers. They were white men as they had long heads.

About the tradition of buried silver treasure in these

## POCAHONTAS COUNTY

-6-

mountains, the versions differ. The general run of the story is that a party of Frenchmen and Indians were traveling this way from the Mississippi Country loaded down with silver, making for Ft. Duquesne and Canada. At the mouth of a stream where a run came into a smaller stream, they found they were pursued. Here they buried pots of silver and sought safety in flight and never returned. I have heard the exact location is the mouth of Swago, Stony Creek, Douthards Creek, Clover Creek, Deer Creek, forks of Deer Creek, mouth and forks of Sitlington Creek, Indian Draft and most everywhere else. However, I hold there is little doubt that this treasure is buried on the waters of Stony Creek. Up on the family's Jerico Farms, there are still holes in the ground which a treasure seeker dug seventy years ago. I do not argue the matter but listen with patience to all who know where this treasure is, even to those who are so far off their base as to say that French Creek, in Upshur, or Jackson Mill in Lewis, or Peel Tree on Lost Creek and Clarksburg on the West Fork, in Harrison have the exact location.

From an Editorial written by Calvin W. Price in the Pocahontas Times for May 1935.